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TREASURY/IET/BRIDGETTE JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OTRA CS
SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR TREASURY ADVISOR RICHARD BARTHOLOMEW

REF: DEPT OF TREAS 261432Z APR 06

¶1. Embassy San Jose is pleased to grant country clearance to Treasury Advisor, Richard Bartholomew who will be in Costa Rica on assignment from May 14 to May 20. The purpose of this visit is to participate in an assessment at the Ministry of Finance.

¶2. Post understands no assistance is required. Whitney Witteman, Economic Chief, is the assigned Control Officer and she can be reached at Embassy number (506)519-2273. The Embassy after-hours emergency phone number is (506)220-3127.

¶3. Upon arrival in country all TDY visitors are to make contact with their Embassy Control Officer for information regarding a security briefing.

¶4. Accommodations: Post understands traveler has hotel reservations. The per diem rate for San Jose is \$104 for lodging, and \$67 M&IE. Post will send confirmation number by email. Please be advised that hotels in San Jose require a minimum notice of 72 hours if canceling or changing reservations. Travelers must notify the hotel or Embassy 72 hours in advance if schedule changes. Hotels will assess a one-day charge if they do not receive advance notice of cancellation or changes. Prior to arrival travelers are to provide the RSO office the required information for TDY registration/emergency contact, which is hotel and/or point of contact information.

¶5. Transportation: The only taxis available at the airport are the Taxi Aeropuerto orange taxis found outside the arrival hall. Tickets for the orange taxis are sold at a ticket booth located immediately outside the arrival hall exit doors. Fares (payable in U.S. dollars or local currency) vary according to destination but the cost of a standard orange taxi ticket to the Embassy is \$12, to the Intercontinental Hotel is \$14 and to downtown San Jose is \$12. Vans are also available at increased cost. If you miss the ticket counter or otherwise need assistance with orange taxi service, the company has an individual posted curbside from where the orange taxis are dispatched. Taxi Aeropuerto also offers pick-up service and transportation to the airport for departing passengers. Reservations can be made 24 hours a day by phoning (506)221-6865.

Elsewhere in San Jose, licensed taxis are considered safe when using standard security precautions. Licensed taxis have a yellow triangle on the door, an identification number, a taxi light on the roof of the car, and generally have working meters. Ask if the meter is functioning before entering the cab. If the meter is not functioning, the cost of the fares should be negotiated prior to entering the cab. Licensed taxis are also easily obtainable from hotels.

Unlicensed cabs come in all shapes and sizes and should be avoided.

16. Public Affairs: Please note that the Public Affairs Office is the Embassy's designated point of contact with the press. If visitors have been scheduled for press events by local partner organizations or others, please inform the Embassy's Public Affairs Office. Should visitors be approached by the press with questions or a request for an interview, they should refer the press to the Embassy Public Affairs Office. In short, post requests that visitors not speak with the press before consulting with the Public Affairs office and they can be reached at 506/519-2441.

17. Travel documents/Threat assessment/Local conditions: All official visitors must travel with passports, preferably official or diplomatic. Without a valid passport, a visitor lacks official status in the eyes of the Costa Rican Government. However, no repeat no visa is necessary.

During this time of heightened security alerts, all travelers should consult the Department's website for the latest public announcements or other safety notices at www.usembassy.or.cr or www.usembassy.or.cr/osac.html.

Costa Rica is currently rated as a "high" crime threat post. The increasing use of violence during the commission of a street crime is a threat to all visitors. Travelers are urged to exercise caution, as in any large city. Local law enforcement agencies do not act according to U.S. standards and have limited capabilities. Jewelry should not be worn on the streets. Large amounts of cash should not be displayed. The downtown area of San Jose should be avoided at night because of the increase of criminal activity that occurs in this area.

Credit card fraud and credit card "number skimming" is a rapidly growing crime. Visitors should avoid using debit cards for point-of-sale purchases, as a skimmed number can be used to clean out an account. Visitors should check their credit card accounts frequently.

Visitors are advised to avoid unofficial moneychangers who may offer better rates but who often trade in counterfeit currency. The present rate of exchange is approximately 504 Costa Rican colones to one dollar. Accommodation exchange is available at a comparable rate at the airport.

Visitors should exercise caution if they will be driving in Costa Rica. The combination of poor road conditions, erratic driving, and pedestrian and animal traffic on the roads make driving very treacherous. Costa Rica has one of the highest accident rates per automobile in the world. The Embassy strongly recommends against driving outside of the San Jose area at night. Vehicles should not be left unattended or packages left visible inside them.

Costa Rica is an earthquake zone and periodically experiences significant tremors.

Visitors should be careful not to eat peanuts or products made from peanuts grown in Costa Rica because they may harbor aflatoxin, which is suspected in the causation of liver cancer.

18. Please note: Effective January 1, 2005, all American personnel traveling to post for a TDY of 30 days or more will need to certify in the country clearance request that they have completed mandatory overseas personal security training as outlined in State cable 66580, dated 25 March 2004.

19. Please be advised that State Department regulations prohibit installation or use of privately-owned computers in any State Department building. Visitors must notify the Regional Security Office in advance if they intend to use U.S. Government-owned portable computers in the Chancery.

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